

March (Cambridgeshire) Scrapbook 1897 to 1990

Facts, Features and (occasional) Fallacies
reported in Cambridge Newspapers
summarised by

Mike Petty

Most of these stories originally appeared in the Cambridge Daily/Evening/News or the Cambridgeshire Weekly News. They are supplemented by some articles published in the Cambridge Independent Press or Cambridge Chronicle

I have digital and other copies of most of the stories summarised.

The original volumes are housed in the Cambridgeshire Collection at Cambridge Central Library together with have detailed cuttings files on over 750 topics that have been compiled since the 1960s.

The complete ‘Cambridgeshire Scrapbook’ of which this is a small section is published online at bit.ly/CambsCollection.

Newspapers sometimes get things wrong. I copy things out incorrectly. Do check. There are a multitude of spelling and layout errors. Please forgive or correct them

News never stops but this file was finished on 31 August 2016.
I will maintain supplements and corrections – contact me for anything you need

Please make what use of these notes that you may. Kindly remember where they came from

See my website – www.mikepetty.org.uk for further notes.

Mike Petty, Stretham

2017

March Scrapbook 1897 to 1990

Note: March is an important town in north Cambridgeshire on the edge of the Cambridge News circulation area from which these extracts are taken. It has its own local newspaper, "The Cambridgeshire Times", which has reported more stories in more details than summarised in these brief snippets. I hope, nevertheless, that they are of some interest.

1897 02 08

Widespread floods, breach of Nene at March

1898 08 03

March Conservative Club – fire engine, p2

1899 01 19

Herbert Varlow, an agricultural and general engineer, residing and carrying on business at Benwick, Ely, claimed £500 from an engineer and wheelwright of West Fen engine, March. He stated the defendant wrote and published an advertisement in the "Peterborough Advertiser" intending to convey the meaning that his business was for sale and he had become insolvent. As a consequence two customers had broken off business. After the advertisement had appeared his creditors "well rounded on him", several pressed him and one issued a writ. The defendant was a trade rival of his. The jury awarded him £150 damages

1900 02 15

Stonea Grange situate by the side of the Great Eastern Railway near Stonea station was destroyed by fire. The March fire brigade left in a snowstorm and experienced some difficulty in getting to the scene on account of the many drifts which had been made during the night. The house was an old-fashioned one and contained some splendid oak-panelled rooms, all of which were destroyed

1902 12 22

Sir – most large towns are closing on Saturday and thus giving their employees a splendid holiday. The plea against the Saturday holiday is that people are unable to cater for four days but it appears that in the neighbouring town of March they think differently, and if they can close there, surely we can here. The grocers' assistants have put in a lot of extra time and I think our employers could give us at least a half-day holiday – "Grocer"

1903 05 14

GER March ambulance, p2

1903 08 18

A shoemaker from March was charged with exposing a girl in the village street of Abbots Ripton during the time she was suffering with scarlet fever. Dr Evison, Medical Officer of Health for March, said he attended a sister of the girl and found her suffering from scarlet fever. A week later Cecilia was also taken with the same complaint. He gave orders for complete isolation but on his next visit had been told the children had been sent away. Dr Newton said he attended two village children suffering from scarlet fever and afterwards found the March children had come in contact with his patients. But he did not see the girl in the street. The summons was withdrawn.

1904 08 17

March school, p3

1904 10 28

A Cambridgeshire boy who commenced life under inauspicious circumstances is now, at the age of 16, lying in the country gaol charged with attempted murder. He was abandoned when an infant and brought up under workhouse rule until 13 when he was engaged upon a secluded farm at Coleseed Drove in the neighbourhood of March. But one morning the farmer heard screams and found his wife

smothered in blood with terrible wounds about the head. One of his children said, between sobs, 'Your new boy hit mamma with a big pole'. When questioned the lad replied 'She did not treat me well. She would not speak to me'

1904 10 28

March Police Court was crowded when the man charged with attempted murder was placed in the dock. As he walked from March Station to the 'bus that was waiting to convey him to the court he chatted and laughed with the constable who had charge of him, and took no notice of the large number of the public who were curious to catch a glimpse of him. Through the windows of the 'bus pedestrians stopped to gaze at him and though there were a few unpolite remarks passed, there was no scene. Two miles out in the fen lies his victim, wife of a farmer in Coleseed Drove.

1905 07 20

The Board of Education have declined to recognise March Corn Exchange as a suitable place to open a Girls' School. This has caused serious problems. The committee had advertised for a mistress but fortunately no appointment had been made. However they had about 30 teachers who needed a secondary school but had nowhere to send them. So they have decided to erect a temporary building for three years and asked Mr Perkins to prepare rough plans 05 07 20c

1906 02 01

Some councillors had taken exception to the bricks proposed to be used at the March Schools, saying they ought to come from inside the county. But Fletton bricks from the London Brick Company at Peterborough were cheaper than the Gildernburgh from Whittlesea. Mr Laxton of Ely had also offered bricks but failed to send samples and quotations. Nobody could say that the contractors did not have a fair trial 06 02 01b

1909 07 30

It is a pity that the new Isle of Ely County Hall at March should be placed in such an obscure part of the town, but it is very convenient for members arriving by train. The building is in the Georgian style of architecture and is a very substantial structure. Electric bells and speaking tubes are provided for the use of officials between the various rooms while the council chamber has seating on the horseshoe plan with a table for reporters, which will be much appreciated by the Press. A gallery affords accommodation for 100 persons, the meetings being open to the public. CWN 09 07 30

1911 09 01

A practical joker drove into Wisbech in a powerful racing car and announced that Grahame-White, the famous airman would fly into the town that evening. A large crowd gathered in a field selected for the landing but there was a high wind blowing and it was announced he had landed at St Ives. The crowds reassembled next morning and scores of cameras were placed in position. But the news broke that the whole thing was a hoax. The man had circulated the same story at March and crowds of people also waited there 11 09 01g

1914 01 009

Death of Mr. John Woolhouse. —The death occurred on Wednesday week at The Lodge, Clayhithe, of Mr. John Woolhouse. Deceased, whose age was 66, was well-known in Cambridge and district. He was born at Wellingmore, near Lincoln, where his father was a large landowner, and came into the district about 29 years ago, and occupied Honey Hill Farm, Manea. For many years prior to going to March, where he resided from 1890 to 1906. Mr. Woolhouse was known throughout the county as a seed merchant and acted as representative for a Sleaford firm. He was the first secretary of the March and District Foal Show Society, an office he held for three years prior to his leaving the town and removing to Clayhithe. He was very popular among the agricultural community 14 01 09

1914 01 16

Territorial recruiting week has seen the Cambridgeshire Regiment up to full strength proving patriotic feeling remains strong and true. The wave of enthusiasm is spreading with recruits coming forward in

gratifying numbers in Ely, March and Soham, proving Fenmen are determined not to be outdone in sturdy patriotism by the men of Cambridge. March is experiencing a wonderful revival of military fervour; the numbers had sunk very low but now there is every prospect the Company will be brought up to full strength. – pic Col Louis Tebbutt & Capt H. Littledale, parade outside Gt St Mary's – 14 01 16 j,k,l

1914 12 11

At the opening of the new Sutton Wesleyan Chapel the Rev Bryant said he felt ashamed that people had previously been worshiping in a building whose ceiling has to be kept together by large planks. The new one was an imposing structure seating 300 people designed by Mr Fovargue of March and built by Mr Giddens of St Ives

1917 01 10

Well Known Farmer and Auctioneer. Many will learn with regret of the death of Mr Frederick Grounds of Elwyn House March, a member of an old and respected North Cambs family. Deceased, who passed away at the age of 65 years, had in failing health for some time past. A native of March, Mr. Frederick Grounds was the son of Ambrose Grounds who owned and kept the Griffin Hotel also carried on the business of a brewer. The hotel was sold upon the death of Mr. Ambrose Grounds but his son continued to carry on the brewery until 1900 when it was discontinued. The family chief pursuits of Mr. Ambrose Grounds were those of a farmer and auctioneer and to these Mr Frederick Grounds finally devoted himself. As an auctioneer, Mr. F. Grounds was very successful. He established the March market some 30 years ago and under big control the business considerably increased. In recent years the conduct of the business has devolved upon his eldest son, Mr. F. D. Grounds', who was in partnership with his father. The late Mr Grounds took a keen interest in public affairs and rendered great service to his native place in many capacities. – 17 01 10c

1919 09 24

Epidemic Among Pigs. The March district has been unfortunate in an epidemic of sickness among pigs and there has been considerable resultant mortality during the past few weeks. The sickness spread among the animals at rather an alarming rate, chiefly on the west side of the town, and swine fever has been ascertained as the cause of death in some cases. The illness is now abating. Cambridgeshire is free from swine fever and the healthy state has been in existence for several months. The March epidemic has not in any way affected Cambridgeshire. 19 09 24

1920 07 07

Fire at March. An outbreak of fire occurred at March on Friday morning, resulting in considerable damage being done to a building used as a motor garage, with hay loft above, in the yard of the White Hart Hotel, March. On the outbreak being discovered the Fire Brigade were summoned, and Mr. Watenfield removed the horses and the motor cars. Capt. Bond was quickly on the scene, and with one of his men he connected hose with the hydrant on the Market Place, and soon had a jet of water playing on the fire. It was this prompt action which probably kept the outbreak in check and prevented it spreading to the adjoining buildings. 20 07 07

1920 07 17

British Red Cross Society ambulances stationed at March and Cambridge are available for anybody at charge of 1s 3d per mile

1922 09 27

Discrepancies in the price of bread in the Ely district and in March were the subject of a complaint made at the meeting of the Isle Conciliation Committee. It was argued that if bread could be sold at 8d. in March, the reduction from 9d to 8 1/2d in Ely last week was not enough. Mr Purchase instanced farm workers whose consumption was 29 loaves per week per household. He believed that suggestions that the farmers would combine together and bake their own bread had an effect 22 09 27

1924 01 28

The 203rd Field Company (Cambs) Royal Engineers celebrated their fifth reunion and dinner. In January 1915 the War Office had asked whether an engineering company could be raised in Cambridge. Great efforts were made but many of the youth had already joined other units. However a start in recruiting was begun and they were able to get a few men together. Their headquarters were in East road but when numbers began to increase they had moved to Ely, March, Whittlesey and afterwards Wisbech. They had no regular Engineer officer to take command of the unit but that grand old volunteer, Colonel Harding, although he was then nearly 70 years of age, undertook the job.

1924 02 18c

A meeting took place at Ely for the purpose of forming an Ely branch of the National Farmers Union. Mr Street Porter said a branch existed at Haddenham and if one was formed for Ely it would be much more convenient for his district. There were four others in the Isle of Ely – March, Wisbech, Chatteris and Whittlesey. There would be no doubt that members would derive benefits from it.

1924 08 23 c

Much interest centred in the band concert and sports meeting held on the Vinery Road Recreation Ground, Romsey Town, Cambridge. The band contest attracted five entries – March Railway Silver Prize Band, Manea Silver Prize Band, Royston Town S.P.B., Soham Comrades' S.P.B. and Letchworth Town S.P.B. There were two contests, a march selection, won by Royston, and a test piece when only four points separated the last three bands, the winners being Soham.

1926 01 02

An outbreak of smallpox has occurred and a young man of March has been isolated. Recently he paid a visit to Cambridge where he attended a market. He became unwell and three days later spots began to appear on various parts of his body. On Boxing Day the doctors arrived at the opinion that the case was clearly smallpox and the man was removed to March Isolation Hospital and 20 'contacts' have since been treated.

1928 04 21

A furnishing establishment and four other shops situated on the corner of Darhill and Dartford Roads in the centre of March were burnt to the ground. They were Mr H.S. Greenhall's furniture shop, a millinery shop of Madame Furban's, the Cambridge Modiste, a cleaner's shop of Mr Layton, Mr Fletcher's hairdressing saloon and a dyer's establishment. Most of the structure was of wood and the flames quickly spread. The conflagration illuminated the whole town and the work of the fire brigade was watched by crowds of people rudely awakened from their sleep. Buildings at the back of the shops had been pulled down as the erection of a music hall on the site is in contemplation.

1928 07 19

Ely Urban Council considered the advisability of obtaining a motor ambulance. Cases were frequently happening where a person was ordered off to the Hospital at once. Last week frantic efforts were made to find an ambulance but the only vehicle that might be termed an ambulance was being used at a funeral and they had to telephone to Cambridge for one. This was a standing disgrace to Ely. Their friends at March had purchased a first-class ambulance for £880 and Soham had one.

1928 12 05

A passenger train travelling from March to Cambridge at over 40 mph crashed through one of the level crossing gates at Milton during dense fog. A motor lorry was practically on the rails. The engine driver appears to have been ignorant of the accident until he stopped some distance from the gates to await a signal. He then sent the fireman back to see what had happened. The passengers were unaware of any mishap. The Milton gates seem to be ill-fated. Numerous similar accidents have occurred there.

1929 01 30

Mr George Sharman, of March, the head of a well-known Isle of Ely family, was killed through falling in front of an express train at March railway station. He founded the 'Cambridgeshire Times'

series of newspapers in 1872 and was actively concerned with the management for many years, two of his sons subsequently taking over the reins. Recently he took over an estate and land agent's business. Several years ago he had a seizure while waiting on the March station platform and fell on the line but was not seriously injured. A widow, five sons and a daughter are left to mourn their loss.

1930 11 21

The old-established Sun Brewery in the High Street at March has been sold to Greene King. It was established in 1800 by Ambrose Ogden and continued in his family. It includes some 40 licensed houses in various villages. The brewing operations in March will shortly cease and the brewery will be dismantled with the premises becoming a depot. 30 11 21

1930 12 01

There was a presentation to E.R. Stone who has recently retired as yard master at the now famous Whitemoor Goods Marshalling Yard, March where the gravity shunting system was successfully inaugurated during his last two years of office. At first his first plans had been regarded as revolutionary and a white elephant. But it had become the outstanding feature of British rail freight working. He was a typical 'John Bull' but beneath that bluff exterior was a kind heart. 30 12 01b & c

1931 02 06

March Greyhound Racing Track staged its inaugural meeting. It attracted a fair attendance, considering there was a big football match, and some fairly good racing was witnessed, though no very notable dogs were competing. Because of the bad weather the track was in very rough condition, being under water in places while the spectators experienced considerable discomfort on the sodden ground. 31 02 06e

1931 10 09

A disastrous fire broke out on the well-known Boarding House Farm, March, the property of Lewis Shepperson, a member of a very old family of agriculturists. Although the outbreak was 2 ½ miles from the town, the entire contingent of firemen with their motor and steam pumps were on the scene within 20 minutes of being called. They found seven stacks ablaze as well as a large barn and range of cattle buildings. They soon pumped the dyke dry as neighbours helped move 60 bullocks and calves to safety. 31 10 09c

1931 10 23

The Isle of Ely lived up to its reputation for political sensation when a Rolls Royce car drew up before County Hall at March and a man alighted wearing an American Stetson hat, just in time to be nominated as 'an independent up-to-the-eye-brows Tariff candidate'. He was Major John Whitehead of Cockayne Hatley Hall. The other candidates are James de Rothschild, National Government Liberal candidate and Frank Knowles for Labour. 31 10 23f & g

1931 11 06

The keenness of competition between omnibus operators in the March area was apparent when the Traffic Commissioners heard applications for bus licences. The March Motor Co. operated services to Chatteris carrying 1,826 passengers a week. But the Railway Company objected saying they were the only operator to keep to a timetable. Their Benwick service averaged 350 on the two days a week that it ran. It had begun in 1922, but lapsed for some years until resumed in October 1930. W. Spriggs of Parson Drove had one of his buses stopped by police for being overcrowded and it had twice broken down. 31 11 06c

1931 11 06

March accident – bale falls from lorry – 31 11 06a

1932 02 08

A March bus driver told an inquest that when he got to Doddington Clock Tower he turned the corner into Newgate at 10 mph. He noticed a stationary bus near Dr Taylor's house and took the precaution

of sounding his hooter twice. When he was nearly clear he saw a lady coming out from behind the bus; he braked sharply but she seemed to be hit by his radiator. He did not notice any bump and thought the wheel could not have passed over her. But she was quite dead beneath the bus. 32 02 08

1932 05 27

The Carnegie Trust offered to meet the cost of erecting a semi-permanent building to accommodate March Library provided the Isle of Ely County Council spend £200 on books. But councillors thought this an unnecessary expenditure at a time when people were hard pressed for money. 32 05 27 & a

1932 06 30

March Town Football Club's season was probably the worst in their 50 years of existence. They had a deficit of more than £30 and several of their best players were unscrupulously persuaded to play for another team. They competed in two leagues and finished at the foot of each. The bright feature was the wonderful loyalty of their few playing members in the face of overwhelming defeats, week after week. 32 06 30b

1933 01 13

The Isle of Ely motor dental van, a completely equipped travelling dental surgery for school children, drew up at Peck and Packer's garage on Dartford Road, March where the tank was re-filled with petrol, a little of which ran over on to the road. When the driver put the self-starter into operation the cab burst into a huge flame and the whole of the front of the vehicle was enveloped in a dense mass of smoke. He made an expeditious and fortunate escape and garage staff quickly subdued the flames. 33 01 13

1933 01 19

March doctor's death – Murphy – 33 01 19

1933 07 20

Black Horse Drove school becomes badly flooded, not only with surface water but with sewage, councillors heard. Since so many more houses had been built on the higher land at Littleport a tremendous amount of sewage comes down whenever they got a heavy storm and settles in the playground. Tenders were received for the erection of a branch library at March together with a new senior school which will be named the Hereward School 33 07 20

1933 08 18

A tragedy occurred at the weekly meeting of the Women's Mission at March Station Road Methodist church when the reader collapsed and passed away. She was the oldest member of the church and it was a tragic coincidence that she met her death at the scene of so many hours of her loving labour for the cause. Several of the lady members were so overcome as to have to receive medical treatment before being able to proceed home. 33 08 18b

1933 08 23

March man's dole fraud – 33 08 23

1934 12 20

Cambridge and March continue to spread out along the main thoroughfares and 'ribbon development' has already disfigured roads in Quy, Girton, Harston and Chatteris. The County Council is primarily a road authority and its objection is from the traffic standpoint rather than from the aesthetic point of view. To retain the beauty of the countryside frontage control much be applied to all roads, the Cambridge Council for the Preservation of Rural England urged. 34 12 20

1935 06 26

The Parliamentary Land Drainage Committee discussed the prospects of flooding in Middle Level. Land 20 feet above the normal height of spring tides should be subject to a drainage tax. This would bring in much of March and three-quarters of Whittlesey but Doddington and most of Chatteris would

be exempt. In the past churches had been inundated and parishioners climbed the towers to get out of the water. People went from Lincolnshire by boat to take food to the folks in Terrington. 35 06 26 & a

1936 05 23

A March grocer told the court the amazing story of a gipsy woman's threat. The accused was a pedlar who lived in a caravan and had nine children. She started telling his fortune, said he had an enemy and that she could prevent curses being put upon him providing he gave her money. This affected his mind and he parted with £50. Eventually a policeman hid behind the glass case in the shop and heard the woman threaten to put a curse on him if he did not fill her basket with groceries. 36 05 23 & a

1936 07 09

March was likely to be a bull's eye for air attack as it was an important railway marshalling centre, residents were warned. Windows smeared with treacle and covered with paper would prevent glass from flying and one room should be made gas proof by blocking up the chimney and other cracks. No air raid would last as long as twelve hours and they would be able to get fresh air as soon as the 'All Clear' had sounded. Following an attack using mustard, tear and liquid gas decontamination would be carried out by the St John Ambulance Brigade. But people must wear a mask as some gases hang around for long periods. 36 07 09b

1936 08 06

March Urban District Council is to resort to firmer measures to deal with horse-play by adults to the recently-purchased swings on the recreation ground in Robin Goodfellow's Lane. The steelwork had been bent due to rough usage. It was one of their most successful schemes for keeping children off the streets but they needed someone living near the ground to keep an eye on things. Houses had been damaged in Eastwood Avenue where putty was removed from recently gazed windows and glass broken. Some tenants were not worthy of the houses and were an annoyance to the others. The Council was doing all it could to make the tenants happy and appealed to them to put an end to what appeared to be sabotage. 36 08 06a & b

1936 09 08

March council received complaints from the residents of Robingoodfellow's Lane about nuisances caused by children using the attractions in the recreation ground. But these are new and their enthusiasm would cool off in time. The swings damaged by rough usage on the part of adults had been repaired and other equipment might be installed at the Avenue and Townsend grounds. The present system of street lighting was far from being what it should be. Since the electricity had installed the system, which was done in a hurry, there had been no improvements. 36 09 08

1936 10 10

March councillors debated bridges. A footbridge should be erected over the river at Marylebone Lane: it would help in getting more houses built in the vacant spaces within the town. But the majority of the inhabitants, many of whom were railway employees, preferred to live on the north side of the river. Coun Ogden thought a light bridge could be erected in Wigstones Road and advocated the building of a highway bridge to which a by-pass could be made. An alternative would be a bridge from Creek Road (through Lambs Yard) to Elwyn Road. 36 10 10b

1936 12 09

Whitemoor railway marshalling yards near March is the most up-to-date in England and the first to be equipped with mechanical rail brakes. The 'up' yard was opened in March 1929 and dealt with traffic from the collieries. The main feature was the 'hump' where wagons were sorted. It was very much like the Long Road bridge, only much bigger. It had good floodlighting but it wasn't a very pleasant place at night. The working is very intensive. It attracted visitors from around the world, especially the Japanese who spent days there, Rotarians heard. 36 12 09a

1936 12 15

March magistrates express loyalty to King – 36 12 15c

1937 04 24

Hundreds of Cambridge people had to walk to work and home again, or to find lunch in the town, because the bus stoppage at the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company's depot was complete. Not a single bus left and two which arrived from March and Peterborough were met by pickets and not allowed to leave. There was no violence, but men surrounded one bus which attempted to leave on the Chesterton-Station service. No other efforts to take out buses were made. Premier Travel services are not affected. Meanwhile Herbert Robinson have taken delivery of 500 Raleigh bicycles 37 04 24 & a. & c

1937 05 22

A wages tribunal was told that agriculture in the Isle of Ely was totally different from Cambridgeshire; the soil was more productive, the crops were apt to be heavier, the type of agriculture was more profitable. And yet there was a uniformed rate of wages for workers in both areas. Budgets were considered of families from Castle Camps, Swavesey and March where the father of a family of five earned only 35s 6d a week clear; he'd had had no Sunday suit or boots for six years 37 05 22 & a

1937 08 05

Councillors praised a March constable's praiseworthy act in rescuing a drowning horse. In the early hours of July 17th a horse and cart, the property of March UDC, tumbled into the River Nene. When Pc Davies arrived the horse was practically submerged but divesting himself of clothing he plunged into the water and with difficultly succeeded in releasing the animal which swam to the opposite bank. It was a very brave act; but for him the horse would undoubtedly have been drowned. 37 08 05a

1937 08 11

Accident at March East railway crossing – 37 08 11a

1937 09 16

The Isle of Ely County Council considered the construction of a new road eliminating the bends between Chatteris and Warboys Road, together with the widening of the south side of the Haddenham-Earith Road to include the filling-in of the parish pond. But tenders for £440 to improve the conveniences at Manea School seemed a gross extravagance when there were only 200 children on the books. At Manea they could build a bungalow for that price. Some classes were having to be held on the stairs at March High School as there was no room left in the cloakroom, extensions should be started as soon as possible 37 09 16a

1937 11 05

Ald H.F. Peatling, chairman of the Isle of Ely County Council opened the extension to the County Hall at March with a silver key and then unveiled a tablet in the entrance hall to commemorate the occasion. The building, which cost £17,000 (about £94,500 now), would make for more convenient working of the Council officials. Parliament imposed an ever-increasing workload which meant more staff; there had been 300 applications for the last post advertised. The Chairman then entertained the whole of the council to a luncheon. 37 11 05c

1938 02 25

Alderman Payne said many of the homes for mental defectives in the Isle of Ely were becoming overcrowded and could take no more patients. They wanted to build a new colony at March to accommodate 128 men. But the cost had soared and savings must be made. However Coun Sole thought they should not be so sparing and that money should be found to allow the walls to be plastered. 38 02 25a

1938 06 29

Several towns in the Isle of Ely were 'raided' by bombers in the early hours. There was no cause for alarm, because the raid was nothing more than an experiment to test the effectiveness of air raid

precautions. Two bombers from Marham left the aerodrome to spot the black-out area in Whittlesey, March, Chatteris & Wisbech. March and Chatteris were in complete darkness and it was an eerie sight to see the chain of lights representing the brickyards, being switched on and off during the flight. But some motorists would not comply with the requests of air wardens to dim their lights. 38 06 29

1938 10 25

Ely Council discussed air raid precautions and thanked the 140 volunteers who assembled the respirators, working till three in the morning without a break. However there were difficulties: "Whatever we try to do at Ely, the big bugs at March put the damper on it", Col Archer said. They were going to test the air raid siren that had been fixed to the roof of the police station. The siren had been tested at March and was not thought satisfactory, so it had been passed on to Ely. But if it was not good enough for March, it was not good enough for them. 38 10 25a

1940 03 08

Station "Explosion" Test. A presumed explosion in a railway station cloakroom provided a topical setting for the practical tests for the Cambridge District Officers' Shield ambulance competitions held in Houghton Hall Cambridge, on Saturday. Six teams from L.N.E.R. stations took part and the championship was comfortably retained by March "A," who scored 338 points out of a possible 400, 204 in the team test and 134 in the individual (oral) test. 40 03 08

1940 08 30

King Inspects Cambs. Men. Members of the Home Guard from the Cambridgeshire zone were among those inspected by the King during his tour of defences in East Anglia on Friday. About 200 men were drawn up outside a railway station under the Zone Commander for Cambs. (Major W. N. Phillips), the Cambs. detachment being under Vice-Admiral Lake and a detachment from the Isle of Ely under Mr. Levitt. After Major Phillips had been presented, His Majesty chatted to several men in the detachment, most of them old soldiers of the last war who wore the honours won then. Among the Cambs. men with whom his Majesty talked were ex-R.S.M. Harvey, D.C.M., formerly of the West Yorks Regiment, R.S.M. Harmer, D.C.M., of March, late of the 14th Hussars, and an 18-year-old telegraph boy now in the Home Guard. Before leaving, the King sent a message congratulating the men on their smart appearance, and he left to the sound of three ringing cheers. 40 08 30

1944 06 30

Effort to Save Town from Destruction. Driver Benjamin Gimbert gave a graphic account on Tuesday of the efforts of himself and his fireman to save a small Cambridgeshire town (Soham) from destruction when they discovered a blazing wagon in their ammunition train. He was giving evidence at the resumed inquest on the two victims of the explosion, which occurred on June 2, completely wrecking the local railway station and causing considerable damage to houses in the town. The blazing wagon, loaded with 500lb bombs, was nearest the engine, and after being uncoupled from 50 other wagons was being driven away when it exploded. The fireman and a signalman lost their lives. "As we approached the station," said the train driver (Driver Gimbert, of March), "I saw a fire in the first truck attached to the engine. The bottom of the wagon was ablaze all over. I asked the fireman to uncouple the blazing truck from the remainder of the train and he uncoupled it. The fireman then rejoined me on the footplate. I thought that by pulling away with the blazing wagon, we could save the inhabitants of the town and the station. That was my main worry. As we neared the signal-box, the signalman, 'Sailor' Bridges, appeared on the platform and I shouted to him to stop the mail train. Before he replied, there was the explosion. I think we had travelled 100 to 150 yards when the explosion occurred." Verdicts of 'Misadventure' were: recorded, tribute being paid to the railwaymen's bravery.

1944 07 28

Explosion Heroes Honoured. Cambridgeshire people will feel a sense of keen satisfaction at the award of the George Cross - the civilian Victoria Cross—to two local men for their heroism in the ammunition train explosion at Soham last month. The awards were announced in the London Gazette. One of the men, Fireman James Nightall; aged 22, of the Hythe, Littleport, lost his life in the

explosion. The other, Driver Benjamin Gimbert, aged 42, of 17, Estover Road, March, was severely injured, but was able to travel to Cambridge this week, accompanied by his wife, to receive the congratulations of his superiors on the award. The official citation said: "Gimbert and Nightall were fully aware of the contents of the wagon which was on fire and displayed outstanding courage in endeavouring to isolate it. There is no doubt that if the whole train had been involved, as it would have been but for the gallant action of the men concerned, there I would have been serious loss of life and property."

1947 06 02

Yesterday, in the little fen town of Soham, the memory of two railwaymen who three years ago gave their lives that the town might be saved from complete obliteration, was remembered and honoured by Soham people. Local people recalled how in the early hours of June 2nd 1944 fire broke out in an ammunition train standing in Soham station. Driver Benjamin Gimbert of March, and his fireman Mr E. Nightall of Littleport uncoupled the blazing wagon and started to shunt it away from the town. Signalman F. Bridges of Soham was about to warn other rail traffic in the area when the wagon containing high explosive bombs exploded. Soham station was completely wiped out and Nightall and Bridges were killed. On the spot where the station was now stands a pre-fab hut which serves as a booking office, waiting room and control centre. But the match-boarding wall of the hut now bears a brass tablet which tells the story of Soham's escape from destruction

1948 04 10

The recommendation that Cambridgeshire, the Isle of Ely, Huntingdonshire and the Soke of Peterborough should be grouped as one administrative council has already started tongues wagging in all areas. The proposals have been received with mixed feelings, and have provoked many questions. The Isle of Ely and Peterborough papers think March would be a good centre for the new authority. Cambridgeshire County Councillors may have other ideas!

1950 05 22

The whirlwind which swept through Cambridgeshire last night caused extensive damage at Sutton. A double-decker Eastern Counties bus was lifted up by the miniature tornado and thrown down onto its side shaking up the passengers and injuring at least two. The bus was just leaving Sutton on its way to March, and was travelling along Ely Road carrying 14 passengers. The driver was uninjured but the conductor was knocked unconscious. Breakdown crews from Cambridge and Peterborough tried to move the bus off the road. Traffic was diverted through Mepal airfield.

1951 10 26

Last night saw the first Youth Conservative function under a post-war Conservative Government when Cambridgeshire Young Conservatives and their friends met at the Dorothy Ballroom for a long-awaited "Victory Ball". Visitors came from as far as March and Peterborough to join in the fun. Dancing was to Reg Cottage and one novelty dance was the political elimination; the first party out was Labour and the winners were "Conservative". Miss E. Plummer (Teversham) won a biscuit barrel with her lucky admission ticket. Other prizes included a basket of fruit, a tray of sweets, a basket of apples, and nylons.

1952 11 04

The opening of a new branch of the Country Landowners' Association for the Isle of Ely was celebrated by a dinner at the Griffin Hotel, March attended by some 80 local landowners. Lord de Ramsey said the area contained the best farmers and worst landlords in the country – the sinking of the Fens was enough to discourage any Fen landlord from being too enthusiastic in improving roads or laying down concrete yards. Landlords had been looked upon as political and fiscal whipping boys between the wars but now had a very real opportunity of recreating rural life around them.

1954 12 14

It was a really grand and successful annual show and sale organised by the Cambridge Fat Stock Show Society, but typically it had to rain. Nevertheless farmers and visitors kept up a steady

attendance. By far the most outstanding entries were in the carcass competition – the first held outside Smithfield. The champion prize was won by Stanley Hoy of Holland Hall, Melbourn, with an Aberdeen-Angus polled steer while Messrs L. Shepperson of March won the class for the best heifer, horned or de-horned with no more than two broad teeth.

1955 05 13

British Railway's new weedkiller train can cover up to 100 miles of track a day and recently made the Ely-March run handing out lethal doses of weed-killing concentrate at up to 20 mph. It is operated by two Cambridge men, Bob Lee and Jack Aldhouse. Working away from home has its disadvantages but their living accommodation is as luxurious as any caravan with interior-sprung mattresses, dining room, galley and chemical lavatory. Jack attends to the living accommodation and Arthur keeps an eye on the machinery. 55 05 13 b & c

1956 02 06

The British Amateur Ice-Skating Championship held at Bury Fen, Earith, was attended by eight skaters who had received trials for the British Olympic team. The entry of 32 was the largest ever known but the bulk of the competitors were London rink men and local skaters had little opportunity to shine. The Drake Digby Memorial Shield for boys resident within a 40-mile radius of March was won by A Bloom of Bressingham. 56 02 06

1956 02 21

The names of Cambridgeshire civilian casualties from the last war are included in a roll of honour which was handed over for safe-keeping in Westminster Abbey. It has been placed in a memorial case within a few paces of the Unknown Warrior's Grave and a page will be turned daily. It includes the names of T.R. Samsen who was killed near Oakington, Pamela Turner, an evacuee of Old Bank Prickwillow, Fred Stanley of the Hone Guard who was killed at Pampisford and Albert Stones of March. 56 02 21a & b

1957 02 25

Keys to a bungalow at 246 Green End Road House were officially handed over to its first occupants, Mr & Mrs L. Hart, by the Mayor. It is the 4,000 council house completed since 1945- an average of 353 houses each year. The 1000th was opened in Peverel Road in December 1948, the 2,000th in Whitehill Road in May 1953 and the 3,000th in Colville Road, March 1952. The site had been an eyesore, now it is a tremendous improvement. 57 02 25c

1957 07 25

Miss Lilian Clarke has left all her books on Cambridge and her pamphlets, pictures, maps, newspaper cuttings, lantern slides and negatives to the City Library with the request that all duplicate items be sold and applied towards the publication of her book 'Cambridge Calling'. She also left all her papers relating to the Clarke family to the County Library at March and her blankets and pillow cases to the Evelyn Nursing Home. 57 07 25

1958 03 06

A March grocer told the bankruptcy court that at one time he had branches of his business in St Ives, Littleport & Downham Market. He also owned and ran a wholesale grocery business to keep his own shops supplied. He had been successful during the war due to assured profits and the absence of competition but now had a deficiency of £4,784 and was living on National Assistance. 58 03 06b

1958 06 10

Cambridgeshire Regiment's band – March Railway Band mass enlistment – 58 06 10

1958 10 01

Ten years ago Eastern Electricity's Fens sub-area had been faced with a back-log of work. Some 171 villages and about 4,000 farms had been without a mains supply – but now all had been connected. They had enlarged sub-stations at Bassingbourn, Histon, Chatteris and March and erected new

overhead power lines. There was an increasing interest in floor warming equipment which was very much a 'coming thing' and improvements had been made in meter reading. 58 10 01

The Cambridgeshire Collection has newspaper cuttings files from this date

1962 06 23

Two village railway stations may be closed by British Railways. Only five people a day use Black Bank station on the main March line; the buildings are gradually subsiding into the fenland soil leaving the former stationmaster's house in a poor condition. And only eight people a day use the 11 stopping trains at Harston station; by closing it they could save nearly £700 a year. 62 06 23

1962 08 21

Trains were cancelled after a derailment blocked the main line at Sawston – only a mile from the scene of a similar accident six months ago. The Dagenham to Whitemoor (March) goods train broke in two on a slight incline. The break-away section of the train caught up with the rear of the front part bouncing a 5,000 gallon tanker filled with paraffin a hundred yards along the track. The tanker ended up standing on end with paraffin splashing on the line. Firemen stood by with foam sprayers as engineers cleared it using a giant crane 62 08 21

1963 03 15

The battle of the fens is on with councils in direct competition with each other in efforts to attract more light industry and halt the migration of their populations. Chatteris has a good labour force but every day 200 women leave to work in factories around Cambridge. March has a large railway marshalling yard employing 1,500 people and wants industry in case it is reduced in size. Ramsey are trying to get firms from Middlesex, bringing 500 employees into the town. It has little to attract them but hope that 'bingo and the cinemas' will be enough amusement until it can grow. 63 03 15

1963 03 27

The Beeching report on the future of British Railways suggests the closing down of 19 stations in the Cambridge area – including three serving the main towns of Haverhill, Saffron Walden and St Ives. There would be the complete withdrawal of passenger services from branch lines, Cambridge-March, Gt Shelford-Marks Tey, Audley End & Bartlow lines. Amongst the village stations closed to passenger traffic would be Histon, Wimblington and Chatteris, Bartlow, Pampisford and Linton together with Soham and Fordham. Services from Black Bank would also cease 63 03 27 & a

1963 04 02

The withdrawal of passenger train services from St Ives would be a great blow to trade; people in villages would not use buses with that tedious journey, the town's Chamber of Commerce heard. The line from March to Cambridge would remain open for freight and a rail conductor service for passengers might be provided. But it would deter industrialists who were considering setting up business. More light industries should be encouraged; they would supply the population to fill houses and the factories would contribute towards the rates and help meet the high cost of the new sewerage system. 63 04 02a

1963 04 04

The shock of Dr Beeching's plans to close Chatteris railway station and the St Ives loop-line connecting them with Cambridge and March is over. But Chatteris councillors' battle to maintain the line is hotting-up. It would hit many residents who travel to work in Cambridge each day or visit Addenbrooke's Hospital. If the station closes there would be more traffic on the roads which are already congested and make the town isolated, they claim. 63 04 04

1963 05 16

Two wage bags, containing £20,000, were snatched in a daring daylight raid at March. One of the assailants was sprayed in the face with purple dye during the attack on the blue Securicor Ford Anglia car occupied by three security guards as it made its way along Station Road. The raiders used one car

as a ram, threatened a woman who tried to grab one of the bags, made off in a handily placed can, then stopped a pursing laundry van by throwing a brick through its windscreen. They next changed to another van that was found abandoned at in the Graysmoor area. 63 05 16

1964 05 13

Isle wants development for Wisbech, March and Chatteris – 64 05 13c

1964 06 17

March store owned by Miller and Skoulding catches fire – 64 06 17a

1964 07 18

The new three-storey March divisional police headquarters and Civil Defence area control in Burrowmoor Road replaces the old station in High Street built just over a century ago. The ground floor is designed to accommodate an inquiry counter, communications equipment, accommodation for officers, police woman and a parade room together with a surgeon's annexe and a cell block. Upstairs are rooms for the admin, traffic and CID while the basement comprises the Civil Defence area control. 64 07 18

1963 03 10

March expansion plans – 65 03 10c

1973 01 12

In the medical field a health centre is a social parallel to a village college. A health centre provides a very wide range of services and facilities to its "customers" all in one place. While Cambridgeshire was not among the real pioneers it has certainly joined the vanguard quickly. For it is now believed that there are more general practitioners based in Cambridgeshire Health centres, as a percentage, than anywhere else in the country. And this has all happened since the first health centre in the county was opened at March in 1969. Sawston Littleport and Whittlesey followed that year. Ely and Soham got similar centres in 1971, two more at Bar Hill and Fulbourn are now being built for opening next spring

1974 12 20

Southend winger, Tommy Horsfall and Kettering youth team captain, Steve Fallon, are both set to sign for Cambridge United as new manager Ron Atkinson moves in to the transfer market for the first time. Fallon, an 18-year-old former March Grammar School pupil could be the first Cambridgeshire boy included in the United first team squad for years. "He is a lad who, with a bit of luck, could be gold-dust", said Atkinson

1976 04 05

There is something splendid in the sight of an old steam locomotive thundering along the tracks. But like all grand old ladies, the Greene King which steamed proudly through Ely on a special run, hasn't got the stamina she once had, and instead of completing the run both ways from Ipswich to March she ran out of steam on the return journey. Now the old loco is at March waiting to be repaired so she can head back into retirement in Essex

1976 04 15

Fenland villagers who bought cheap whisky buried it in their gardens and poured it down the drain as police began investigating the theft of more than 2,000 bottles from Whitemoor railway marshalling yard at March. Almost £8,000-worth of Haig and J & B Export whisky bound for the continent was stolen in three raids from vans at the yards. Some whisky was hidden a suitcase, some was transferred to lemonade and sherry bottles, and some of it was drunk.

1977 05 16

The new Campaign for Real Ale guide to Cambridgeshire shows that, with the exception of a few oases, the north of the county remain a "real ale" desert. In the area between Huntingdon, Ely,

Wisbech and Peterborough only 24 real pubs exists and of these five are in one town, March. The blame is put squarely on one major brewery, Watneys. But there are 42 more “real ale” pubs than last year, bringing the county’s total up to 216 and in Cambridge itself 11 brewers supply real ale to more than 40 public houses

1979 06 29

The first three factories to be built in a town by the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas have been opened in Wisbech. They will be followed by others at Littleport, Ramsey, Chatteris and March. The policy had been to build them in truly rural areas but they decided to give special help to small towns where job opportunities were very limited. MP Clement Freud said it is helping people with cottage industries to take a stride forward; they cannot afford the overheads of a modern and efficient factory but this offers them units at a very good rent and will help them grow.

1980 10 01

The county fire service will be ruined if planned cuts of £200,000 are implemented. At Cambridge the number of firemen will be cut by 20 and one of the three pumping appliances scrapped. There will be just one pump at Ramsey, March and Huntingdon and even then redundancies might still be needed. And if the firemen settle for a pay rise of more than 11 per cent there will have to be extra cuts. The news was greeted with horror by councillors who say it would put the county in peril. 80 10 01

1980 10 07

One of the most dramatically effective road works, the St Ives by-pass which provides the first new crossing of the Great Ouse since the 15th-century, sweeps round the town partially using the track of the old St Ives to March railway line. It will carry virtually all the vehicles presently queuing to cross the medieval stone bridge which has been the worst bottleneck in the Cambridgeshire road system. Now it will be closed and the average flow of 11,000 vehicles a day will dwindle to around 500. 80 10 07a

1981 03 06

Rail closures are back in news; British Rail wants to close the March-Spalding line in May 1982. It was constructed to carry coal; in the 1950s there were lines of coal trains waiting to get into March station yard but then clean air campaigns in London finished the traffic. The track is in good condition and the hard-up Eastern Region want to plunder it for rails and sleepers to use elsewhere. 81 03 06

1981 09 25

It has taken British Rail 37 years to honour two heroes of an ammunition train explosion at Soham, but now two inter-city locomotives are to be named after Ben Gimbert and Jimmy Nightall. Relations and railway officials will gather at March railway station for the ceremony. Violet Gimbert, Ben’s widow, said ‘Why didn’t they do this when he was alive?’ 81 09 25a & b 81 09 29

1982 07 01

A crop-spraying plane sliced through power cables at Landbeach, narrowly missed crashing near houses and flew off, leaving 2,500 homes without electricity. The pilot had been skimming a field, flying under the 11,000-volt cables which are just 20 feet above the ground, when a wing clipped the wire. This is the seventh accident involving a crop-spraying aircraft in the past five years. In 1977 a pilot was killed when his machine plunged to the ground at March. Others occurred at Earith, Keyston and Abbots Ripton. 82 07 01

1984 03 22

Churches, as the centre of worship and comfort in times of need were once held in high esteem. Today as religion increasingly takes a back seat their fate hangs in the balance. In Cambridgeshire alone there are 21 redundant churches. St Mary’s in Benwick and St Mary Magdalene in March have been demolished while churches in Little Raveley, Little Ouse and Barway have been sold as homes and St Margaret’s in Wyton is used as a games and recreation room. 84 03 22 p19

1984 11 19

The newly opened Larkfield centre for the mentally handicapped in Ely includes classrooms, workshops, art room and activity area together with a special care unit to cater for the needs of the severely handicapped. The outside has been set aside for recreation and horticultural work. It means people will no longer have to make the journey to Cambridge or March for specialist care. 84 11 19 p5

1985 08 07

A Nene-Ouse navigation link from Stanground to Salter's Lode would allow through passage from Bedford, Cambridge and Ely to the major waterway network of the country, via the Grand Union Canal. At present about 650 craft annually use locks at either end of the proposed link, a figure that could treble. The Middle Level would be improved encouraging craft to stop at March and Whittlesey, boosting tourism and leading to additional industries such as craft workshops and camping sites. 85 08 07

1986 01 07

Cyril Ridgeon began his tiny timber business in one room in St Barnabas Road in 1911. Now the company is celebrating 75 years of trading. During the war they stored timber on behalf of the Government sending supplies down to London to repair blitz-damaged houses. The firm opened branches at March and Saffron Walden and is now planning to move its Tenison Road and Cavendish Road operations to a new site on Coldham's Lane 86 01 07 & 86 01 02

1986 02 04

Memories of Stirling bomber that crashed near March in 1944 – 86 02 04

1986 09 25

Ben Gimbert and Jimmy Nightall have long been folk heroes on the railway following the ammunition train explosion at Soham in June 1944. Jimmy was killed and Ben critically injured as they uncoupled a burning truck loaded with bombs, saving the town. Both were awarded the George Cross. Now, 37 years later, relations, railwaymen and people from Soham gathered at March station where British Rail named two Inter-City diesel locomotives after them. The Bishop of Ely blessed the engines and children from Soham Village College sang a hymn composed especially for the occasion. 86 09 25a & 29

1986 11 26

County Councillors have given permission for private developers to build sheltered housing for the elderly on public land. The scheme will provide new homes at Westward Ho! Ramsey, 25 bungalows at Home Close, Fulbourn and accommodation for another 23 in March. Some councillors disagree with doing deals with private firms who might exploit the elderly for profit. But it means a lot more places than the council could possibly afford. 86 11 26b

1988 05 14

Two new railway level crossings are being installed on the line between Ely & March over the weekend. The crossings, at Beald Drove, North Fen, Second Drove and Black Bank will have automatic barriers. They are triggered by oncoming trains and mean the end of manned gates or barriers operated by signalmen. 88 05 14

1990 01 16

Cambridge's planning chief fears for the future if some of the high-tech and other commercial development, which is clamouring to start up in the city, cannot be diverted to other parts of the county. Officials are preparing an action plan based on a report by University land experts. Ely, Haverhill, Chatteris and March are suffering from a depressed economy and would benefit from the establishment of firms sent from Cambridge 90 01 16a

1990 10 17

Heritage Shooting Ground with 11 indoor ranges, opens at March – 90 10 17b